

# Drama that acts as an 'icon'

Pat Ashworth on a production that did not need a hymn

BRIDGET FOREMAN pulls a masterstroke in letting us get a good way into this powerful drama before revealing that a key figure, the sharp-suited leader of the synagogue, is actually Jairus, "Abba" to his child, Esther. Like scales falling from the eyes, everything wondrously begins to make sense.

Developed from her short play, *Daughters of the House*, commissioned by Jane Williams and Margaret Sentamu for the 2008 Lambeth Conference, this isn't intended to be a "faithful" rendering of the Passion story. Anna Gooch's touring set, with its small, steeply raked stage, has the marks of an icon, and the play works in the same way as an icon in not seeking accurate representation but inviting an individual response to the actions of God. It works beautifully, and has a humanity about it that shines.

Foreman presents Jesus in the context of his life in Capernaum, where he has an easy familiarity with people and can even turn his hand to a spot of carpentry when required. So, for Jairus, the teaching

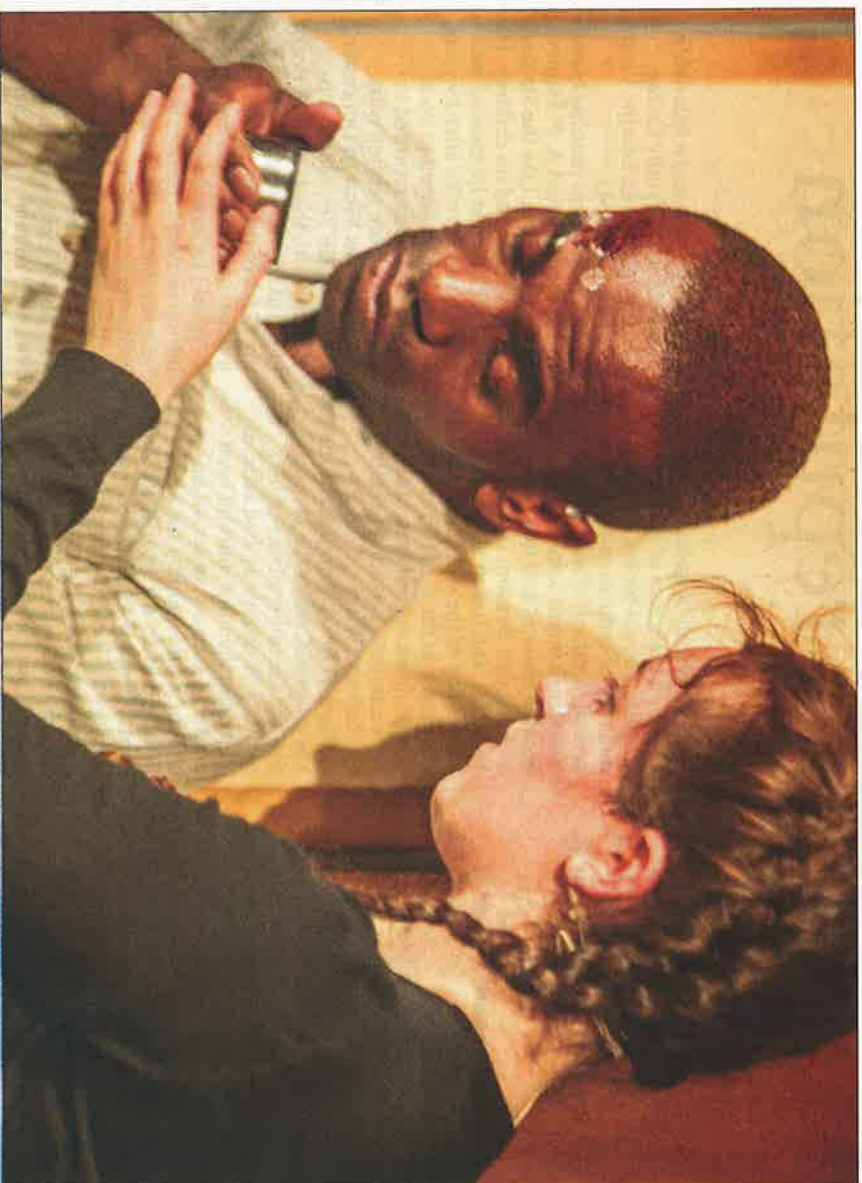
and the miracles are presumptuous, "crazy stuff", and Jesus's association with women a scandal — in particular, the Mary Magdalene/woman-taken-in-adultery figure of the pregnant Tovah, and the outcast cripple who declares herself as invisible as dust to the Temple worthies.

Kolade Agboke's Jesus is energetic, practical, confident, charismatic, demonstrating showmanship and masterly good timing when he heals the cripple.

"Unbelievable!" he expostulates when all Jairus can do in response is splutter, "But it's the sabbath!" When he speaks a parable, it is unrehearsed, a process of thinking out loud tailored to the person to whom it is addressed. For Jairus, therefore, the story is the Prodigal Daughter.

There are moments of high drama: Tovah stripping off the bindings that had hidden her pregnancy; Jairus distracted at Esther's death — and images full of association, such as the spreading of a pure white, lace-edged cloth for a supper of bread and wine. The last words attributed to Jesus from the cross come in a deeply moving context that it would be a spoiler to reveal.

It is the Passion story in close-up: intense, intimate even in the cathedral-like setting of St Mary's, Nottingham. Directed by Paul



Intense and intimate: Kolade Agboke and Hannah Parker in Riding Lights' *Inheritance*

Burbridge, all four actors give outstanding performances, with strong, clear narrative from Ruben Crow as Jairus, Gail Kemp as Tovah, and Hannah Parker as both the pigtailed Esther and the crippled woman. Solo recorder music is haunting, and silence is built into the structure of the play.

Just one thing jarred for me. After the death of Jesus and before

the thought-provoking final scene, the audience is invited to stand and sing the hymn "When I survey the wondrous Cross". The scene had been so strong that I wanted at that point just to sit and reflect. I didn't want to be led into anything. There was a further invitation to respond afterwards at the foot of the cross of nails in the south transept, but the hymn was an awkward note in

what was otherwise a piece of perfection.

*Inheritance* plays at Romsey Abbey tonight, and then tours to churches in Dorchester-on-Thames, Kettering, Cheam, Gerrards Cross, Malmesbury, and Derby, closing in West Bridgford on 19 April. For details, including box offices, see [ridinglights.org](http://ridinglights.org) or phone 01904 655317.